

Sermon Notes - May 2, 2021
(John 15:5, 8-17)

Our scripture lesson today has several important lessons in it. 1) It talks about staying connected and be connected to the most important relationship we can have - and that's the one with Jesus Christ and God the Father. 2) He talks about how he no longer calls us "servants," but "friends." He says, "You did not choose me, but I chose you. 3) And if you are my servants (my friends), you will love as I have loved. You will love others as I have loved you."

When I was growing up, I had a best friend that went with me all the way through school, until I was in the seventh grade. She moved away because her Dad got a transfer to the west coast. I never heard from her after that. My mother died when I was in the sixth grade. Somehow, after my parents died, when I was in the sixth and the twelfth grade, I had a hard time forming friendships because I didn't want to get that close to anybody, that I would lose them. I lived that way until I was probably about 30 years of age. I had "casual friends," but no deep friendships, except for Jesus Christ. Jesus is and was my best friend, and still is - the one who I could share the intimacies of my heart, my deepest desires and hurts, joys and sorrows, anxieties and fears. He's always been there for me. What Jesus talks about in this passage is about believing that he is the Son of God, accepting him as our Savior and Lord, and living for him. If we stay connected to him, we have a meaning and purpose in life that nobody else can give us. We have a joy that is there, no matter what our circumstances in life. He will always be there and never leave us or forsake us. He will lay down his life - and did lay down his life - for us.

Staying connected is important, isn't it? Most of us stay connected today by Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, phones, texting, and all kinds of stuff that we didn't have thirty years ago. We want to stay connected, don't we? Jesus says the most important relationship you have is that with him. He said, "I am the vine and you are the branches. If you remain in me, and I in you, you will bear much fruit." That fruit is loving one

another. Staying connected is important in life, whether it's trying to find a job, trying to find a church in a new community, trying to find advancement in your job, or get scholarships. It's important who you know, isn't it? Stay connected.

Some of you may remember that several years ago there was a movie that came out called, "Schindler's List." It tells how Oscar Schindler (during World War II) a Roman Catholic business man, rescued 900 Jews from being persecuted or killed by Hitler and the Nazis. Leopold Page was one of those 900 Jews that escaped. He told Oscar Schindler, "One day, I'll make your name a household name and everybody will know who you are and what you did for the Jews." When the war was over, he opened a shop; it was a book and gift shop. One day he met a novelist in his shop who came to buy a briefcase. He told the guy about Oscar Schindler. He said, "I so want a book written about this man and all he did for us Jews. I want the world to know what he has done for us, especially other Jews." So, this novelist decided that he would write a book and he called it, "Schindler's List." Well, Leopold Page was not satisfied just with a book - he wanted to get it to be a movie. So, he had some friends who had some friends who had a friend who knew Steven Spielberg, who was the big movie producer of "Jurassic Park," and many other movies. He was able to make a connection and meet up with Steven Spielberg. Leopold Page said, "I promise you, if you'll just read this book, interview some of the people that were rescued by Oscar Schindler, you'll have a movie that will win Oscars. I promise you will. Promise me, Mr. Spielberg that you'll read it." So, Steven Spielberg read the book and then he interviewed some of Leopold's Jewish friends, and he decided to make it into a movie. It became a "Best Motion Picture" and won seven Oscars. Leopold Page said, "My dream came to fruition because of my connections along the way." God brought it about so that people knew who Oscar Schindler was and what he did for the Jews.

It's important to have connections, isn't it? But, our most important relationship is with Jesus Christ. I want you to notice something in our scripture today - Jesus says, "I no longer call you 'servants,' I call you 'friends.'" Do you know why that makes a difference? ... A servant is told

what to do, but a friend is invited to participate in your activities. A servant or slave only speaks when spoken to, but we invite our friends to share in our conversations. A slave or servant doesn't know what the Master is going to do, but a friend is invited to know and share in your plans, ambitions, desires, hurts, joys, etc. - a servant doesn't do that. A servant knows their worth by their pay, but a friend enters into a priceless relationship with you and me.

Jesus said, "I no longer call you 'servants', I call you 'friends'." I want you to see two of the qualities that he laid down about friendship. He told his disciples and us: "I have taught you all that the Father has shown me and told me, and I lay my life down for my friends. Greater love has no one than this that a man lay down his life for his friends." Now, you need to understand the context of that - in Greek and Roman society, when the philosophers would get together and discuss the attitudes about life and friendship, guess what an ideal friendship was in that day? ... It was to have "frank and open speech, holding back nothing, and to lay your life down for your friends." The philosophers would discuss that and say, "Well, nobody is going to lay down their life for somebody else unless they truly love that person." We know that's true, don't we?

But Jesus talked and lived out the ideal friendship. He not only told us who God was, who he was and what he wanted to do (redeem us, save us, teach us about God's love and forgiveness and mercy), he gave his life for us. He didn't talk about laying down his life, he did it. He says, "Now, I'm calling you to be my friends. You didn't choose me, I chose you. Now the choice is yours - do you want to be my friend? If so, I invite you to love me and to love one another as I have loved you - laying down your life for one another, sharing honestly and holding back nothing. Tell me the secrets of your life. Let me in on it and I want to share with you all about God and who he is. He wants to give you joy, love, peace, and hope. Lay down your life for others."

Last week, we talked a little about sacrificial giving of your life, one for another. Jesus probably doesn't ask us to give our physical life for somebody, but he does ask us to make sacrifices of our time, our talents,

and our monies. Sometimes he is going to ask us to encourage somebody, to listen to somebody, to give and help and share with somebody when you don't feel like it. Godly love is not just "when I feel like doing it." It's doing it because we love God and we obey him because we do love him.

I want you to notice this distinction between a servant and a friend: A servant obeys because they have to, and they may get punished if they don't - or they don't get paid. A friend obeys because they love somebody. Jesus loves us and he wants us to obey him because we love him - not because we have to, but because we want to. He's offering us friendship. "I don't call you 'servants.'" Of course he's our Lord and Master, he should call us servants - and we are, but he says, "I don't want you to just be 'a servant,' I want you to be my friends." Friends know what the other is doing; they understand about kingdom work and they lay down their lives for one another. "I'm wanting you to be my friend and partner in the ministry to the world - to help others know my love and mercy."

Many of you remember that Mother Teresa was a Catholic "Sister of Charity" and she served the poor in India. About two years before she died, she spoke at the National Prayer Breakfast in Washington, D.C. The emcee introduced her as "The Greatest Woman in the World." You know how short she was - she got up to speak and couldn't even see over the podium. She said, "If I was the greatest person in the world, wouldn't God have made me a little taller so that I could see over this podium? I'm far from the greatest person or the greatest woman in the world, but I want to tell you about the greatest thing in my life - I am a tiny pencil in the hand of God, someone through whom God can write love letters to the world." I want you to remember that. "I'm a tiny pencil in the hand of God, someone through whom God can write love letters to the world." That's what he's called you and me to do -- through our words, our actions, our attitudes - to share his love with the world. Do you want to be friends? The choice is yours and mine. "Will you be my friend?" Jesus says. "If you become my friend, it can be risky. There are sacrifices involved. Sometimes the world won't understand. Sometimes they'll

hate you. Sometimes they'll misunderstand your motives and what you do. But, I am asking you to sacrifice. Love one another as I have loved you. Be frank and honest - don't hold anything back. Share your secrets with me. I want you to know me, stay connected, and abide in me. When you stay connected with me, nothing can pull us apart. I will never leave you nor forsake you. If the connection is broken, it will be because you walked away or turned away - not because I left you. I love you. I'm calling you to be my friends and partners. Yes, I am your Lord and Master, but I don't want you to obey me just because you have to. I want you to obey because you love me. I love you and I want you to join me in my kingdom work."

Jesus calls us to be a tiny pencil - someone through whom God can write love letters to the world - through you and me. Will you be his friend? Will you join him and be a partner in his kingdom work? Sometimes it won't be easy to make sacrifices, because we don't "feel like it" or we "don't want to." But, Christian love, Godly love is doing the right thing, in the strength of God. Only God can help us love our enemies - we can't do that on our own. But, God says, "Love others as I have loved you and share openly - don't hold anything back."

May we be friends with God and partners in his kingdom work.
Stay connected. Amen.